Re-Definition of the Concept of Power (A Case Study in Africa)

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Abstract- This paper is set out to make discourse of the concept of power, with a clear concentration of how the concept is seen and practised in Africa and further discussing how the concept of power has overtime changed in Africa, which is the re-definition of the concept of power as it relates to Africa. The application is based on the most comprehensive means to achieve the purposes set out in this study; thus, the study will applicably review existing works of literature in the areas where that cover the concepts contained in this study. This study found that power is a necessary evil which has come to become the norm in so far as politics, governance and socio-economic spheres of life are concerned. The study also found that the comprehension and practices relating to power have over the years changed. However, Africa is still lagging in reference to global idea of power, which gives room for constitutionality, democratic rules and dividends of governance. The unique contribution of this study is that the information which is contained in this paper is sieved from the findings of various scholars who have distinguished themselves in the study of politics, economy, sociology and concepts in Africa. Further, this study comes in time to cover the fields which are not covered by the previous studies.

Index Terms- Power, Africa, Re-definition, Constitutionality, Democratic,

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of power has over centuries become a significant concept in socio-political thought within the globe. Power is a political phenomenon that cuts across all the dimensions and facets of governance and the socio-political; human socio-economic endeavours (Bunier, 2010). Though the concept has a long history with the political structure of the human's society; it is imperative to state that there seems to be no uniform definition attributable to the conceptualization of power; thus, there variant analytical frameworks, methodologies, models, structures and context within which the concept of power is viewed. This is to say that the meaning of the concept of power is complex, just like many other concepts in social sciences and humanities (Posner, and Young, 2007).

The complexities associated with trying to get a definite meaning of the concept of power has to the suggestion that instead of making attempts to define the concept, the concept of power should be analyzed and explained. Even in cases where this suggestion of explaining and analyzing the concept of power in lieu of defining it is adopted, a reader or the audience would notice the variations with the explanation being offered. However, one thing that is sacrosanct and common in any form of explanation, analysis or definition that may be offered in relation to the concept of power is that it always features the capacity of a person or group of persons, or capacity of an entity or state to attain the set-out objectives effectively and timeously with little or no hitches (Bratton, 2007).

In the bid of attaining these objectives by the person or entity that can do so, there may be a sort of resistance or hitches, this where the application of coercion which may embody application of physical force. It is the application of force to achieve a set objective by the person purportedly in possession of the capacity to get things done that brings the model of coercive and consensual powers into the lexicon of power as a concept. Given the above, power as a concept amongst humans and the society can be one which is coerced or one who is voluntarily consented to by the objects or subjects of the power (Posner, and Young, 2007).

Although power is mostly construed in the political sense and dimension, the concept of power flares across various sectors of human endeavours, aside from political powers, there are economic powers, academic powers, social powers, technological powers, religious powers, legal powers (Hassan, 2013). The agreed implication is that where any person or entity either individually or collectively possess the capacity to influence, control, direct or persuade another person or entity whether individually or collectively, to do or act in accordance to wish of the person or entity having the capacity for the objectives set out to be attained by the person or entity having the capacity, in respect to any given aspect of human endeavours, the person in possession of the capacity is said to have power over the person who is influenced, controlled, directed, or persuaded, in so far as that aspect of human endeavour is concerned (Bunier, 2010).

Notwithstanding the several facets of human endeavours in accordance with which the concept of power is distinctly conceptualized to; several studies have it that the ideal concept of power is political power (Amuwo, 2014, Hassan, 2013). The studies posit that political power is the supreme power as anyone who has political power is in a position to control the custodians of other forms of powers. Another argument in support is that the custodian of political power is also in a position to regulate the extent to which the custodians of other forms of power can exercise and exert their powers. Also, political power is all-encompassing, as it is the power at the root of human society and its structures. This study will concentrate on presenting a

concerted discourse on the concept of power with extreme interest in political power (Amuwo, 2014; Hassan, 2013).

The concept of power in Africa has been one which is inconsistent. This may be traced to the colonial history of most regions in Africa; however, it does not suggest that the concept of power was not in existence prior to the colonial era. Prior to the colonial era, traditional African societies have their political structures and communities. These political structures and communities did not thrive on their own, as there were different levels of capacities that instil discipline and common goals as a standard in the communities. Thus, there was in existence in the traditional Africa societies the concept of power (Goldsmith, 2004).

Depending on the practices, norms, customary and cultural heritage of a given community, the power can be residing in a given individual (monarch), or a family (royal family) or group of esteemed persons (cabinet members). It follows that prior to the obstruction of the relative peaceful political structures and communities in Africa by the storm and breeze of colonialism; Africa already had a form, model, frameworks or hierarchies of power which is used in stemming the affairs of the members of the community. Upon the advent of colonialism, the concept of power in Africa was given a different outlook which includes but not limited to violence, propaganda, conflict, and uncontrollable quest to hold on to power (Cilliers,&Hedden, 20 November 2014). This suggests why it was easier for the colonialists to penetrate into Africa, even to hinterland than it is for them to give in and surrender power back to the Africans when Africans started questing for what rightly belongs to them. In the streets of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Soweto (South-Western Town in South Africa) and Nairobi (Kenya), Africans were maltreated in the bid for the colonialists to restrain power for the indigenous Africans. The argument is that these series of events and coupled with other factors relative to the colonial regime did to a large extent influence the concept of power as seen and practised in Africa (Cilliers,&Hedden, 20 November 2014).

This study will discuss the concept of power in Africa from the period immediately after most African countries regained independence until the present disposition of power in the continent. This research is of the opinion that Africans did not gain independence; the independence of African states was stolen and was later re-gained by African states. The research study will progress in the next part by discussing the concept of power based on literature review and in the next part will analyze the concept of power, using Africa as a case study.

II. CONCEPT OF POWER

The concept of power may be viewed as a process which is analogously related with concepts like commitments, and obligations, between two entities which may be likened to superior and subordinate, which may be coercive or voluntary in nature. Power may be seen as a capacity given to a person or entity as a result of a binding contract which has in it certain roles, rights and obligations of the parties, and parties thereto are bound by the terms of the contract. To this end when there is any form derail or deviation from performing the obligations created in the contracted, the party vested with the capacity can in response to the non-compliance, apply coercion or force either by threat or actual infliction of sanctions so as to compel the performance of the obligation (Posner, and Young, 2007).

Power may be implied as to the capacity inherent in a given status or acquired by a person to secure the doing of the terms of a binding obligation existing in a collective organization in so far as the said obligations are consensual and legitimized in accordance with common goals and objective of the collective organization, and any form of recalcitrant attitudes towards the performance will be curtailed through sanctions or threat of such (Bunier, 2010).

Some political theorist did not subscribe to the idea that power is consensual; to them, the concept of power is more like being synonymous with coercion and force. To this set of theorist, power is the unalloyed capacity to impose one's ideal purposes, objectives and interest on others (Posner and Young, 2007). This definition seems like the concept of power is the ability to place others where they do not want to be and compel them to do what they do not want to do. It implies that the society is a contraption and that defeats the long-standing theory of state contract.

It has been argued that power involves legitimation. Therefore, power should not be conceived as one-sided thing where only a unit of the collective whole commands all units with no checks and balances. This idealization of power is the ideal form of power; in that, it does not leave the other units of the collective whole empty-handed with just the expectation that they are to follow the obligations spelt out in the contract. Contract as we all know is a bi-polar system, where there are obligations levied on each of the parties; and there are rights and liabilities for failure of any of the parties to abide and comply to the terms of the contract. In this sense, and dimension, the capacity to command, influence, control and persuade is not residing on one side of the collective whole only; it resides on both sides but the exercise of the capacity inherent in the contract is depending on the party who defaults (Brown,2012).

The foregoing conceptualization of power is ideal in the spirit of the aphorism "Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely". Therefore, in order to avoid the circumstance where power is rested on one side of the collective whole in the contract, it implies that the unit may get livid and power-drunk, which would defeat the eternal purpose of state contract theory. Some political theorist and philosophers have termed this as a progressive concept of power (Bratton, 2007).

The implementation of the concept of power in a given society is determined by certain factors (Posner,& Young, 2007): Legal framework; Political arrangement; Existing precedents; Legitimacy; Bilateral and multilateral relationships; Population; and Sovereignty. The existence of the aforementioned factors will determine the level, form, model and extent of the power which may be exercisable in a given society (Posner, & Young, 2007).

In order to exercise power effectively and efficiently, there are applicable methodologies. These methodologies may work in a combination of one another or maybe applied solely. The applicable methodologies are depicted in the figure below.

Figure 1: Methodologies of exercising po
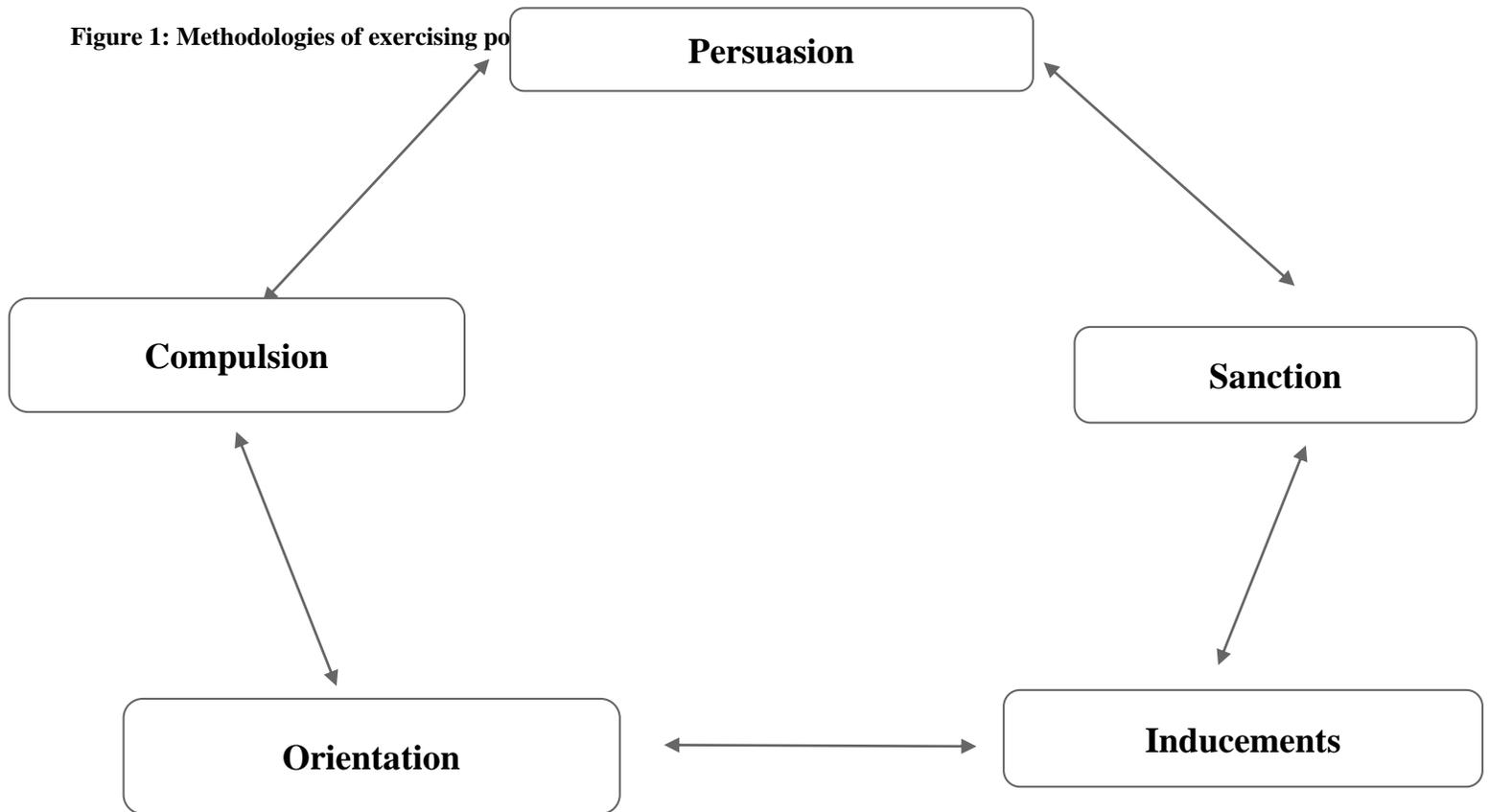
These methodologies identified above are not exhaustive. There are other methodologies which can be applied in the exercise of power. However, these ones contained in figure 1 above are the prominent methodologies which have proven effective in various settings (Bunier, 2010).

In the next part of this study, the study will progress to discuss the Re-definition of the concept of the power of Africa.

III. RE-DEFINITION OF CONCEPT OF POWER IN AFRICA

The concept of power in Africa has, over the years, been depicted in high and low scales. Africa, as a region, has the highest concentration of the people of the black race. It comprises of people whose religious ideologies feign majorly between Christianity and Islam, and a handful of others who are rooted in the traditional African religion. Africa is located at the southern hemisphere, with most of her countries around the equator. Africa is amongst the six major continents of the world, and the people from Africa are referred to as Africans. Africa is a locality that is rich in agriculture, gold, oil, diamond, lead, and other natural resources. The argument is that Africa is the centre or cradle of modern civilization. In this light, Africa would have been in a better condition if not for the truncation and obstruction brought to the region by the European colonialists (Goldsmith, 2004).

Figure 2: Countries in Africa

East Africa	West Africa	South Africa	Central Africa	North Africa
Burundi, , ,	Benin, ,	Angola,	Cameroon,	Algeria, and
Comoros,	Burkina Faso,	Botswana	, Central African Republic	Egypt,
Djibouti,	Cape Verde,	Lesotho,	Chad,	Tunisia,
Eritrea	Côte d'Ivoire,	Malawi,	Congo,	the Islamic Republic of Mauritania
Ethiopia,	The Gambia,	Mozambique,	Democratic Republic of Congo,	Libya,
Kenya	Ghana,	Namibia.	Equatorial Guinea,	Morocco.
Madagascar,	Guinea,	South Africa,	Gabon,	

Mauritius,	Guinea Bissau,	Swaziland,	São Tomé and Príncipe	
Rwanda,	Liberia	Zambia		
Seychelles,	Mali,	Zimbabwe.		
Somalia,	Niger,			
Sudan,	Nigeria,			
Tanzania	Senegal,			
Uganda.	Sierra Leone			
	Togo.			

Between 17th and 19th Century, Africa was raided by the colonialist who stole the political power in various indigenous African societies, and Africans were forced into accepting colonialist political structures, which form the basis for modern-day African societies. However, by the wake of the 21st century, Africans began to quest and fight in order to regain their stolen independence and political mandate. Following the events of Pan African movement, majority of the African countries regained independence from the colonial benefactors, and there were attempts heralded for the first time after long-forgotten time, where Africans are to be ruled or led by fellow Africans without any direct or indirect orders from the non-Africans (Hyden, 2006). It means that most African leaders fused both the learned system of governance/authority from the colonial benefactors and the inherent style of authority in Africa; coupled with the experiences under the colonial government. The outplay was a great turn out of tyranny, autocracy, and violence exhibitions of authority. Initially, it seems the exercise of power was legitimately obtained and exhibited; but with time, just as in line with the phrase, "power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely"; the power which was once legitimate became a coercive or violent one (Hassan, 2013).

Whereas some African countries could be said to have enjoyed democratic victories over time, other countries are trapped in the form of power where they have no option or say. Some other parts of Africa have all been hit by series revolutions and violence; the exercise of powers in these countries often start off as legitimate but end up being a violent or coercive power, or in other cases, it can start as a violent or coercive power, and along the line, gain legitimacy and may further end up as coercive (Hassan, 2013).

Some other parts of the continents have been faced by counter government activities and pro-government movements. These countries such as Somalia, Sudan, etc. are embattled between two different governments in the same country all seeking for loyalty and authority via violent means. The case of Sudan caused the country to separate into South and North Sudan in 2005, but the case is still the same in the region (Okunu, 2016).

In some other parts of the continent, there have been cases of leaders who have been in rampant and abusive disregard of the laid down constitutions and laws governing the countries. In Congo, Joseph Kabila has been the president for over 18 years. Kabila had refused to leave the office. The case of Uganda is a more bitter one, the president, Yoweri Museveni has been on for more than 30 years counting; same is the case in other parts of the continent where the heads of state have been injected with the sit-tight syndrome and have incessantly refused to step down even after the appointed time had elapsed (Okunu, 2016).

The quest to hold power or be in the custody of the capacity to exercise political powers have been a deadly virus that has affected the main fabrics of the political cotyledon of Africa. During the initial decade of independence amongst African countries, in the 1960s, there were issues on how to transmit powers and how to gain powers. Everyone wants to take over political power. In the small geographical territory of Benin republic, there were within a single decade more than ten (10) heads of state, who were all overthrown through violence or coup d'état, one after the other (Posner, and Young, 2007).

The case of Benin republic is a point of reference to other states which were devastated with the sharp violence that orchestrated the coups that ushers in every new power-seeking ruler. These series of events drastically affected the rate of development and growth in Africa. This is because, the leader who emerges from these unsacred means of gaining power only concentrated efforts on how to maintain power and forestall any form of deviance or further opposition (Posner, and Young, 2007).

In this regards, the emergent leaders in various African countries were more conscious of how to remain in power than how to make meaningful impacts in the lives of citizens. The African leaders who had the capacity to exercise power often employed it to combat any form of opposition or critics, whether in existence or ones suspected. This suggests why the first declaration usually made by the African leaders would be to suspend or abolish all existing laws prior to his emergence as the leader and also the bar against political activities and the freedom of the press was to a large extent curtailed or wholly terminated. The African leaders would employ all readily available means to destroy any form of opposition whether or not it would amount to bloodshed. Thus, there were great numbers of violent acts which were self-sponsored by the leaders (Cilliers,22 October 2013).

There were no rooms for positive political participation, human rights activists etc. The regime of Abacha in Nigeria hampered the activities of human rights activist, to the extent of initiating the plans that led towards the execution of death sentence against the renowned Ken Saro-Wiwa and other members of the Ogoni extraction, in present-day, Rivers state. Across Africa, there were cases of leaders who clamped down media outlets and termed them as committing treason and disturbing the peace of the state (Amuwo, 2014).

In the time past, between 1960 and 1970, there were cases of African leaders whose thirst for power and quest to perpetuate their regime as leader purportedly declared themselves as "President for Life". Good examples are (Goemans, Gleditsch, Chiozza,&Choung, 2004): President of Central African Republic (CAR) Jean-BédelBokassa (who later made and crowned himself to "emperor"), Francisco MacíasNguema of Equatorial Guinea, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, GnassingbéEyadéma of Togo, Idi Amin of Uganda and Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire.

These leaders did everything humanly possible to keep themselves in power. However, their plans were cut short by death or other relative factors. The case of Robert Mugabe, who instead of living office, made himself prime minister and the opposition was returned as president. These are examples of African leaders

who are prone to the sit-tight syndrome. Thus, elections were not reckoned in Africa between 1960-1970, and in countries where elections occurred, the systems were manipulated through every means available by drunken power leaders who did not want the power to shift from their custody. In this sense, the concept of power in Africa will be seen in violence and coercive form (Hughes, 2014).

From the foregoing, it depicts the concept of power in Africa in the negative light where only a unit in the whole collective benefits from the obligations created in the contract of state theory. However, the spheres of the concept of power in Africa in the present day are greatly distinct when compared to what it used to be in the past. Power in Africa can be said to have started towing the lane of progressive or positive conceptualization of power, where the power can be exercised by the unit of the collective whole against whom the obligations are breached.

In this light, it could be stated that power in Africa is no longer centred on the leaders, as the leaders are aware of the power of the people. This does not imply that the negative forms of power exhibition witnessed in the region in the immediate periods after independence have all been exterminated. This is because there are still areas in the continent where leaders are clogged unto powers. One thing noticed is that in the current dimensions of leaders who are clogged unto powers; the leaders utilized legal means to elongate themselves in office, by manipulating other arms of government to enact unlimited tenures of office which means that the president is at liberty to stand for elections (Posner,

and Young, 2007). The biddings of Olusegun Obasanjo (the president of Nigeria, as he then was) in 2006 to influence the National assembly to enact the third term into the constitution of Nigeria failed woefully (Sklar, Onwudiwe, and Kew, 2006).

This sprints into one's mind that the concept of power in Africa has taken on new frontiers where the provisions of written laws are respected at least. Irrespective of the facts that there are allegations of election rigging by ruling parties, it is far better than a situation where elections are not held as at when due and the polity is always heated, thereby handicapping development and growth in the region.

While others have associated the re-definition of power in Africa to influences of bilateral and multilateral relationships, and to an extent the conditions for the award of grants and budget funding from international donors; counter-arguments are that Africans have become more politically conscious than they were and are not readily given to fears and threats. The later could be shown by the rates of political revolutions by the masses unsolicited by any selfish interests but for the common interest of the collective whole. Examples are the revolutions that ousted the Presidents of Egypt, Tunisia, Cote d'Ivoire and those helped to inform other leaders to accept the progressive conceptualization of power or exit from office (Hyden, 2006).

The graph below evidence the drastic change in the manner at which power is obtained or transmitted in Africa from 1960-2020.

Figure 3: Graphical Representation of means of transmitting power and obtaining powers in Africa
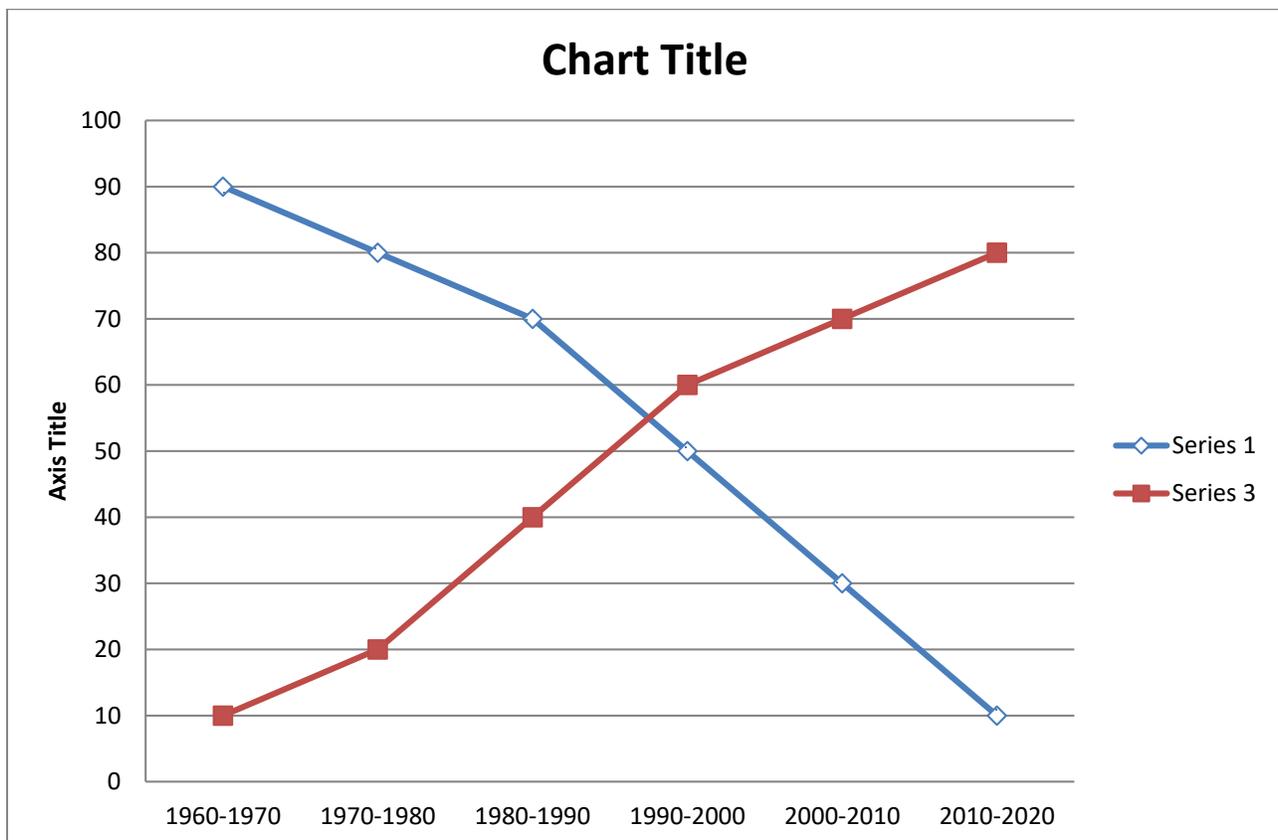
Source: Archivos, A database of political leaders, 2004 and https://www.transparency.org/research

The blue colour represents a change of power through violence, revolution, riot, coup-d'état, assassination, etc. and the other represents a change of power through a constitutional process, public opinions, democratic settings and voting, natural death, voluntary resignation, etc. A look at figure 3 above will show through the blue line that transmission and obtaining power through violence, assassination, coup-d'état, among others, fell from a high ranking of 90% between 1960 to just 10% in 2020, whereas the red verged line in the graph shows that transmission and obtaining of power through constitutional processes, which may be natural death, voluntary resignation, elections, doctrine of necessity has increased from as low as 10% in the 1960 to 80% in 2020. The presentation in the graph completes the entire discourse concerning the re-definition of power in Africa.

IV. CONCLUSION

The re-definition of power in Africa has brought Africa leaders and persons in capacities bequeathed with powers to be wary of the constitutionality or otherwise of their activities and also recognize formal institutions which are needful for to sustain the progressive conceptualization of powers. The media has a better forum and platform than they had in the past. Moreover, there are institutions which are in place to ensure transparency, and accountability amongst the leaders. The re-definition of power in Africa, is that leaders even with their exercise of powers are aware that they will be held accountable and responsible for any single actions or inactions by them.

The emphasis is that within the past decade or more, the concept of power in Africa has taken a new stride and there have been a high level of changes in the political structures in Africa in realtion to the concept of power. It portrays that the era where Africa is depicted as an area where the people has no rights or opinions in regards to the politics and governance in the region has been gradually taken into extinction.

V. RECOMMENDATION

 "Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely". This should be a watch word for every well-meaning African. Africans should ensure that institutions are in place to ensure that leaders are made to account for their roles and responsibilities in governance. The functions of the media and press freedom should be upheld. The technological aid brought to existence vide social media has been playing a great role in ensuring that leaders in Africa are not confused that power can be construed in the negative dimension where the people can be coerced unwarrantedly without any legitimacy. Social media can play a role like it has been playing by making constructive criticism of government policies through the avenues and channels therein.

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